MIḤRĀB[1]

By R. B. SERJEANT

THE origin of the term *miḥrāb* is somewhat obscure. In Islām it is usually particularly applied to the prayer-niche, and the article in the *Encyclopaedia of Islām*[2] treats of it only as such, yet this technical usage of the word seems to be derived from a more primitive and general meaning, and on the balance of the evidence its emergence as a name for a part of the sanctuary appears to be Islāmic only. *Miḥrāb* has been discussed by Nöldeke,[3] by Horovitz,[4] and by Landberg.[5] It has been discussed in connexion with architectural studies by Creswell,[6] and by Sauvaget.[7] These studies cite a number of references and sources which I have re-examined, but do not propose to repeat *in toto*. Each of these authorities shows conclusively that the employment in the technical sense of prayer-niche is not early.

In our one sure early Arabic source, the Qur'ān, the word occurs but five times (*Sūrahs*, III, 37, 39; XIX, 10; XXXVIII, 21; XXXIV, 13). Again there is no need to add to the commentary of former scholars, but it is significant that, in no case, is *miḥrāb* used to mean a prayer-niche. For the Prophet it evidently meant a covered place where people sat.

The *Tāj al-'arūs*[8] contains a full and important article on the subject of *miḥrāb* which it seems fitting to render into English almost in its entirety.

'"The *miḥrāb* is the chamber (*ġhurfah*)[9] and the high place." This al-Harawī transmitted in his *Ġharīb*,[10] on the authority of al-Aṣma'ī.

Waḍḍāḥ of the Yaman said,[11]

"A mistress of a *miḥrāb* whom, when I go to her,
I do not meet until I ascend a flight of steps (*sullam*)".

The prominent place of the room (*ṣadr al-bait*) and noblest (*akram*) place in it. Al-Zajjāj said concerning the word of God,[12] "Did the news of the foe

[1] It is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to the scholars I have consulted in preparing this article. To my colleague Maḥmūd al-Ġhūl I am specially indebted for his very considerable contribution, and the thorough examination he has made of the inscriptional material. To the courtesy of Professor Carl Rathjens I am indebted also for permission to reproduce the sketch of the Hugga Temple (fig. 2).

[2] *EI*, under 'Kibla', 'Masdjid', 'Miḥrāb'.

[3] *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, Strassburg, 1910, p. 52, footnote.

[4] 'Bemerkungen zur Geschichte und Terminologie', *Der Islam* (Strassburg), XVI, 1927, 260–3.

[5] *Glossaire daṭînois*, Leiden, 1920–42, 393 seq.

[6] *Early Muslim architecture*, Oxford, 1932, I, p. 99.

[7] *La mosquée omeyyade de Médine*, Paris, 1947, 145 seq.

[8] Cairo, A.H. 1306, I, 206.

[9] *Ġhurfah* (pl. *ġhuraf*) seems also applicable to houses of some sort, for there are two Ḥaḍramī villages with these names.

[10] Brockelmann, *GAL*, I, 107, *Suppl.*, I, 166 seq.

[11] Ibn Duraid, *al-Iṣhtiqāq*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen, 1854), p. 47, reads *lam adnu ḥattā*, for *lam alqa-hā aw*, the former being preferable.

[12] Qur'ān XXXVIII, 21.

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come to you when they scaled the *miḥrāb*?" [1] "The *miḥrāb*", he (al-Zajjāj) said, "is the highest room (*bait*) in the house (*dār*), and the highest place in the mosque." "The *miḥrāb* here", he said, "is like the *ghurfah*."

Concerning the Tradition that the Prophet sent 'Urwah b. Mas'ūd to a tribe (*qawm*) of his at al-Ṭā'if, and he came to them, entered a *miḥrāb* of his, and at dawn looked down on them, then he performed the call to the prayer, he said, "This shows that it is the chamber (*ghurfah*) to which one ascends".

Abū 'Ubaidah said, "The *miḥrāb* is the highest place (*ashraf al-amākin*)".

In the *Miṣbāḥ* [2] (it runs), "It is the highest of places where one sits (*ashraf al-majālis*)".

Al-Zuhrī said, "The *miḥrāb* after (the usage of) the common people (*'ind al-'āmmah*) (in the sense in which) people understand it, is the station (*maqām*) of the Imām in the mosque".

Al-Anbārī said, "The *miḥrāb* of the mosque was so named because the Imām is there by himself and removed from the people. Hence one says, 'So and so became angry on account of (*ḥaraba li-*) so and so', when there is distance and mutual hatred between them. . . . It is said that the *miḥrāb* is the place in which the king is by himself and far removed from the people".

In the *Lisān al-'Arab* [3] (it is stated that) "The *maḥārīb* are the prominent parts of the places where people sit (*ṣudūr al-majālis*). From this (is derived) the *miḥrāb* of the place where one sits (*majlis*), and from this (also is derived) the *maḥārīb* of Ghumdān [4] in the Yemen. The *miḥrāb* is the *qiblah*, and the *miḥrāb* of the mosque is also its prominent part and the highest place in it".

It is the Tradition of Anas that he used to dislike the *maḥārīb*, i.e. sitting in the prominent part of the place where people sit (*ṣadr al-majlis*) and being on a higher level than other people (*yataraffa' 'ala 'l-nās*).

(Concerning) the word of God,[5] "And he came out to his people from the *miḥrāb*" they say (means), "from the mosque". The *miḥrāb* is the noblest of the places where kings sit (*akram majālis al-mulūk*), according to Abū Ḥanīfah.

Abū 'Ubaidah [6] said, "The *miḥrāb* is the Lord (*saiyid*) of places where one sits, and that which is set foremost (*muqaddam*), and the loftiest of them (*ashrafu-hā*)". "Thus it is", he said, "in relation to the mosques."

According to al-Aṣma'ī, the Arabs call the castle (*qaṣr*) a *miḥrāb*, on account of its loftiness (*sharaf*), and he quoted,

"Or a statue (*dumyah*) decorating a *miḥrāb*,
Or a pearl sold to a merchant".

By the *miḥrāb* he meant the castle (*qaṣr*) and by *dumyah* an image (*ṣūrah*). Al-Aṣma'ī related on the authority of Ibn 'Amr b. al-'Alā', "I entered one of

[1] The commentators render this phrase as, *Idh taṣa"adū sūr al-ghurfah*.
[2] Al-Faiyūmī, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-munīr*, Cairo, 1912, 198. *Ashraf* could mean 'most honourable'.
[3] *Lisān al-'Arab*, I, 206, new ed., I, 305.
[4] The famous castle of Ṣan'ā', the site of which is still known to this day.
[5] Qur'ān XIX, 10.
[6] cf. Brockelmann, *GAL*, I, 103. Abū 'Ubaidah was born in 110/728.

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the *maḥārīb* of Ḥimyar and the scent of musk blew upon my face ". He meant a castle and the like.

Concerning the word of God,[1] " Of *miḥrābs* and statues (*min maḥārīb wa-tamāṯīl*) " al-Farrā' said, " He remarked that they were pictures (*ṣuwar*) of the angels,[2] for angels were depicted (*tuṣuwwira*) in the *masjids* so that the people might see them and reflect the more ".

Al-Zajjāj said, " It is the same thing, the *miḥrāb* in which one prays ".

It is said that the *miḥrāb* was called a *miḥrāb* because the Imām, when he stands (*qāma*) therein, is not safe from committing a solecism or an error. . . .

The *maḥārīb* of the Banū Isrā'īl are their *masjids* in which they used to sit, as if it were for counsel in the matter of war. According to the *Tahḏīb*,[3] " in which they used to congregate for the prayer and the like ".

Similar to this is Ibn al-A'rābī's opinion, " The *miḥrāb* is the place where people sit (*majlis*) and congregate ".'

A most significant opinion quoted is that of al-Zuhrī (ob. A.D. 742) who flourished towards the end of the Umaiyad period. He places the *miḥrāb* at the *qiblah* end of the mosque, but does not identify it positively at least, with the *qiblah*. He defines it as the diction of the common folk with this sense, which might seem to indicate that it was developing a technical application at this period. The *miḥrāb* was a raised place where people sat, and it is associated with notions of honour. In this way it is related perhaps to the raised mud part of the reception room in a house I saw in Ḍāli', known there as *dīwān*, in Ṣan'ā' as *līwān*,[4] but in Baiḥān as *ḥidaḥ*. It might be added that the word *qaṣr* by which some of these early authorities define *miḥrāb*, means in Ḥaḍramawt a story of a *dār*,[5] but I do not suggest positively that it has been so used here.

The question at issue is, then, what exactly did a *miḥrāb* mean before Islām? That the word was derived from Ethiopic seems to me unlikely for, relative to Southern Arabia, Abyssinian culture would seem to be primitive and derivative. Salis Daiches has proposed to connect it with the Hebrew חֲרָבוֹת in the sense of castle, palace[6] and supports his argument from a number of Biblical citations. My colleague Maḥmūd al-Ghūl has provided me

[1] Qur'ān XXXIV, 13. These were provided for Solomon along with *jifan* like cisterns (*jābiyah*), and cooking pots. The decorated *miḥrābs* were then probably places where guests were entertained. In view of recent archaeological discoveries in Southern Arabia it is interesting to find the commentators state that Solomon's throne was set on two lions while two eagles (*nasr*) were above it.

[2] An angel's head in marble discovered in Ḥuṣn al-Ranād in Tarīm has been embodied in the new castle built on that site.

[3] Of al-Azharī, ob. A.H. 270.

[4] C. Rathjens and S. D. Goitein, *Jewish domestic architecture in San'a, Yemen*, Jerusalem, 1957, 73. See also p. 451 *infra*.

[5] ' Building and builders in Ḥaḍramawt ', *Le Muséon*, LXII, 1949, 284. Perhaps in Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*, ed. O. Löfgren, Leiden, 1951–4, II, 181, there is an echo of this sense of *qaṣr*.

[6] 'The meaning of חֲרָבוֹת', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, XX, 1908, 637–9.

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with the data at present available for ancient Southern Arabia which I quote *in extenso*.

'The term *mḥrb* occurs twice in known South Arabian inscriptions. It is not known for certain to what sort of structure or locality either might have belonged, because both were known only after having been removed to Aden.

The earlier known inscription, *CIH*, 106 (BM 55), seems to have originated from Kawkabān in the region of Hamdān, because the name of that locality is mentioned in the inscription which reads,

2. */br'*
3. *w/whšqrn/mḥrbn*
4. *KWKBN/*

2. (they) laid the foundation of
3. and completed the *miḥrāb*
4. Kawkabān.

The reading of the word *mḥrbn* is established beyond doubt. D. H. Müller, equating *mḥrbn* with *mḥrmn*, on the basis of the existence of a consonantal change, translated the word as "sanctuary". The editor of the *Corpus* preferred the translation "fortification" or "tower", pointing out that according to Hamdānī's *Jazīrah* [1] Kawkabān is described as a *qaṣr* "castellum", and as a *ḥiṣn* "arx". The editor therefore derives it from the root *ḥaraba* "to fight", stating that the interpretation of the term as "fortress" suits the fortified Kawkabān well. This interpretation, in a way, seems to find support in the *Tāj* (cf. quotation *supra*).

The other inscription in which *mḥrb* occurs is in the Kaiki Muncherjee collection. The reading of *mḥrbhw* (R, 4108, 3) is partly restored. This inscription adds nothing to what *CIH*, 106, tells us. The fact that the second inscription was commissioned by someone of the rank of *muqtawi* of the king, *mqtwy* being a restored reading, may not be a sure indication of the size of the *mḥrb* and of whether it was a fortification or something of a more private character.

Another term *tḥrbt* occurs in a number of inscriptions.[2] Mordtmann and Mittwoch here rejected the implication originally made in *CIH*, 357, 12, that the word has anything to do with war.[3] They conclude their discussion by

[1] *Ṣifat jazīrat al-'Arab*, ed. D. H. Müller, Leiden, 1884–91, I, 107, 195.

[2] cf. J. H. Mordtmann and E. Mittwoch, *Sabäische Inschriften*, Hamburg, 1931, 221–3.

[3] cf. R, 4632, where M. Höfner renders it 'Kampfszene'. Maḥmūd al-Ghūl has supplied me with the following additional material on *tḥrb*.

CIH, 537, 10–12, reads:

10. */lḥmdhw/bhr*
11. *'yt/hr'y/lhm*
12. *w/btḥrbn*

Mordtmann and Mittwoch translate: 'and in gratitude to him for the vision which he showed them in?'. With this inscription they compare two more in which offerings of thanksgivings for visions are made. In one case the vision was shown or revealed in *bN'MN/w'LM*, two temples of *'TTR*; in the other *'bmḥrmn/ḏ'WM*, in the temple of 'Awwam'. On all of this they comment: 'In all three cases it has to do with *Incubationsorakel*, vision during retreat'. One more inscription mentions revelation of a vision to be compared with these, *RES*, 3929, 5, which reads: *hgn/*

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saying, " The word (as Ryckmans also believes) ought hardly to have anything to do with war, but rather denotes a cult performance (ritual) or some object associated with the cult. One is reminded of the Islamic *miḥrāb* ".'

Having adduced the relevant sources to show that the word *miḥrāb* was known to pre-Islāmic Arabia, and that it has not actually been proved to have

khr'yhw/bsnthw/, to be translated, ' In accordance with what he showed him in his slumber '. With *snt* compare Arabic *sinah* ' slumber ', as in Qur'ān II, 255, *lā ta'khudhuhu sinat-un wa-lā nawm-un.*

So from these inscriptions we perceive that visions were revealed in temples during sleep, and in *ṯḫrb*. I do not think that *ṯḫrbn* in *CIH*, 357, 12, should be equated either with a temple or with slumber, but that it is another aspect or circumstance associated with the ritual or manner of seeing visions.

With this form of *Incubationsorakel* one can compare two practices in Islām; the *ṣalāt al-istikhārah* and *al-i'tikāf fi 'l-masjid*. In the former a person seeking God's help through a revelation of His will to indicate a correct decision he should make, would, according to ' unorthodox ' practices, perform a special prayer, and then go to sleep in full ritual purity of person and place—which would sometimes be in the mosque itself, hoping a vision would revea to him, while slumbering, what he sought to know. (Cf. *EI*, art. ' Istikhārah '.) In *i'tikāf* the worshipper retires for the last ten days of Ramaḍān into the premises of the mosque, laying on himself rigorous rules of abstinence. The retreat is closely related to the watching of Lailat al-Qadr which is supposed to fall sometimes during these last ten days of that month. It is possible to equate *ṯḫrbn* as a practice with *i'tikāf*. Linguistic support can be found in the statement that the *miḥrāb al-masjid* is so called because the Imām is alone in it, and that the *miḥrāb* is the place where the king is alone (cf. *Tāj, supra*). This sense of retreat or isolation compares exactly with *miḥrāb* in Qur'ān III, 37, 39, and XIX, 11. I take *ṯḫrbn* here, if it is understood as an act, as the verbal noun of form V. As such it could be denominative, in the sense of performing something in, or to do with, a *miḥrāb*. In this connexion it may be recalled that Arabic *miḥrāb* can apply to a tent (Lane), and that the Prophet performed his *i'tikāf* in a tent within the mosque. If, however, *ṯḫrbn* is to be taken as denoting a place, then it is possibly a *tif'āl* like Arabic *timthāl* as Professor Beeston suggests, cf. SA *tqr* ' dressed stones ', possibly for *tinqar* (root *nqr*). As a substantive *ṯḫrb* could possibly have meant ' place of retirement ', in this case either a cell in the temple, or, quite probably, a tent or some other *ad hoc* building. Another form *ṯḫrbt* seems probably to have been some sort of structure. Gl., 738 (*RES*, 4632) was discovered built into the wall of an irrigation kiosk. Over it was a sculpture representing a man with an axe in his right hand and a shield in his left, with two alert dogs on both sides. The text reads:

1. *MRṮDM/wbnh/RṮDM/bny*
2. *(d)YHRḤB/śmw/ṯḫrbt*
3. *(n/)lwfyhm/*

Maria Höfner translates:

1. MRṮDM and his son RṮDM, of the clan
2. d-YHRḤB, have erected this fighting scene
3. for their safety

Dr. Höfner holds that the word *ṯḫrbt* is explained by the relief sculpture and that the dogs represent enemies, but I suggest that if the irrigation kiosk into which the inscription was built is a structure of antiquity, and if the inscription is a part of the original structure, the *ṯḫrbt* refers to the kiosk itself. The word would then bear the sense of ' chamber ' or ' kiosk ', possibly for observation. This may be further corroborated by *RES*, 3512, an inscription unfortunately badly damaged. It is on a libation altar in the British Museum, and it seems to have been offered as an act of thanksgiving for the building of a *ṯḫrb*. Line 3 reads: */ḏ'm'dm/bmwqr/ḏṯḫrbhn/bḷlm/* ' of fresh fruits (or dates) for the offering (or perhaps the meal, feast) for the kiosk of stone '. (*'m'dm*, cf. Arabic *ma'd* ' tender vegetables, fresh fruits or dates '; *mwqr*, cf. Arabic *wakrah, wakīrah* ' food, a meal, given or made on the occasion of finishing a building ', verb *wakara*; *ḷlm*, cf. Arabic *salimah*, pls. *silām* and *salim*, ' a stone ', in the dialect of Ḥimyar. As for the interchange between *s* and *ṯ* it is sufficient to indicate that this inscription is in Ḥaḍramī, a dialect which is known for the changing of *s* into *ṯ*.) (M.G.)

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any direct association with the cult, it is appropriate to introduce new evidence as to the sense of *miḥrāb* which seems to throw a rather different light on its original meaning.

The Ḥaḍramī mosque

In the course of conversation with my invaluable Ḥaḍramī informant, Shaikh 'Abdullāh Raḥaiyam Bā Faḍl, certain strange terms he employed for the parts of a mosque attracted my attention. In answer to my further inquiries he sketched out roughly for me fig. 1, scribbling the words *ṣūrat masjid* over it. Though perhaps no single mosque is intended, Raḥaiyam should have a very sound conceptual knowledge of a mosque plan for he has spent most of his life in and about mosques in Tarīm and elsewhere. I have never met anyone so full of religious lore as this shaikh.

At the top end of the plan is a covered hall, varying in size according to need, entirely closed in, but provided, of course, with roof, doors, and windows. This is called the *ḥammām* or *kanīn*, or *al-makān al-kanīn*, derived from the root *yakunn al-insān*, or *yiktann*, in the sense of ' to cover '.[1] The term *ḥammām* obviously comes from the sense of heating, for during the winter it can be bitterly cold in Ḥaḍramawt in the early morning and after dark, so much so, in fact, that one sometimes sees piles of palm-logs near a mosque used to heat the water for the ablution before the prayer. If *ḥammām* may not yet be discovered in the earlier sources such as al-Hamdānī's *Jazīrah*, it is at any rate found in *al-Jawhar al-shaffāf*[2] composed before the year 855/1451 where *ḥammāms* are mentioned at al-Shiḥr with this special sense. *Al-Mashra' al-rawī*[3] alludes to the foundation of a *ḥammām* in a Tarīm mosque about 801/1398–9 in 917/1511–12. To the extent that *ḥammām* with this sense is not recorded by Lane, it does not seem to be known to the classical lexicons.

In front of the *ḥammām* is a covered area, a sort of portico known as the

[1] Maḥmūd al-Ghūl has drawn my attention to the following passage from the *Tāj al-'arūs*, older edit., x, p. 323 :

والكنّة بالضمّ جناح يخرج من حائط وشبهه أو هى سقيفة تشرع فوق باب الدار أو ظلة تكون هنالك عن أبى عمرو او مخدع أو رف يشرع فى البيت أو كالصفة بين يدى البيت عن ابى عمرو.

[2] Photocopy in SOAS, part II, tale no. 407.

[3] Muḥ. b. Abī Bakr al-Shillī, *al-Mashra' al-rawī*, Cairo, A.H. 1319, I, 141. *Al-Mashra' al-rawī*, op. cit., I, 136–7, discusses the construction of the Masjid Āl Bā 'Alawī formerly known as the Masjid Banī Aḥmad at Tarīm by the famous Saiyid Muḥammad b. 'Alī Khāli' Qasam. It was built of good clay from Bait Jubair, the unbaked clay brick (*libn*) transported to Tarīm on the engine known as *al-jarādīm*, ' which is an engine set on wheels (*a 'jāl*) drawn by oxen and mules, it also being called *al-'arābah* '. It was rebuilt by 'Umar al-Miḥḍār in 801/1398–9, and a minaret added in local style, not like those of the Holy Cities which are after Turkish style. Then he built for it a *maḥall kanīn*, ' for prayer in the winter days ' adjacent to it on the east side, ' and it was made a *waqf* as a mosque known to them as a *ḥammām* '. ' On account of its being a *kanīn*, cisterns (*birak*) were made near by it in which water is heated ; they call it a *ḥammām* because the *ḥammām* is derived from *ḥamīm*, i.e. " hot water ", for it is not the Persian (*'ajamī*) *ḥammām* concerning prayer in which the prohibition has come down to us.' The author then cites two Traditions on this subject. This passage is not very explicit as to the location of the *kanīn* but it looks as if it was built on the side opposite the *qiblah*, perhaps added to the front of the mosque.

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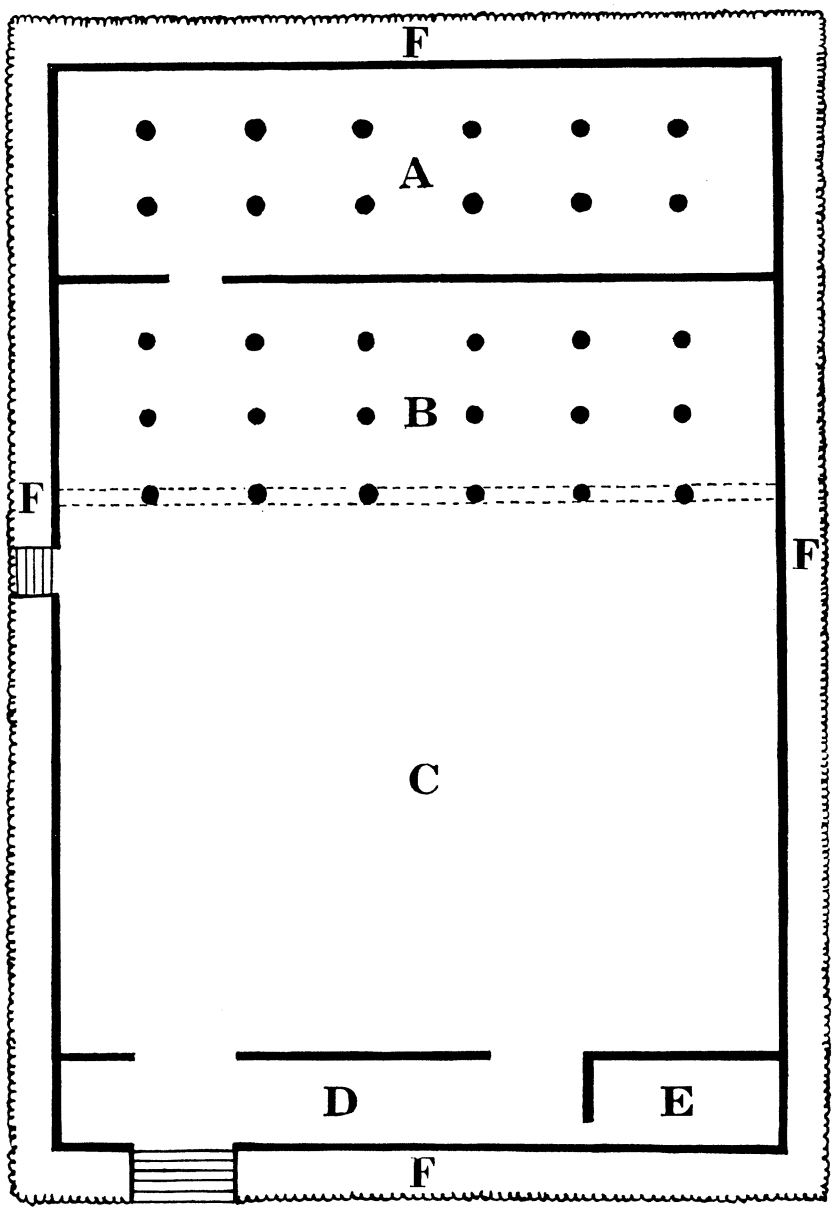

FIG. 1.—The Ḥaḍramī mosque. A, the *ḥammām* or *al-makān al-kanīn*, the covered hall; B, the *maḥārīb*, opening on to the court of the mosque; C, the *ḍāḥī* or *ṣaḥn*, the open court of the mosque; D, the *majāz* or passage; E, the *jawābī*, cisterns for ablutions; F, the *'uṣbī* or stone platform upon which the mosque is constructed.

N.B.—The minaret or minarets are not shown, but as the minaret is usually at the north-east corner nowadays it would be sited somewhere in the region of the area marked E. The *qiblah* would probably lie somewhere above the letter A. Ḥaḍramī mosques face only a little north of west, and for this reason the west is known as *al-qiblī*.

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maḥārīb, open on its other side to a court. A single *miḥrāb* was stated by Raḥaiyam to be a *ṣaff ḥaqq al-sawārī*, a row of columns, along with the spaces in between each column, but it seems to be applied to the whole of this portion of the mosque. That this sense is not recent is confirmed by the hagiology of the Āl Khaṭīb Mashāyikh,[1] a tenth/sixteenth century work which speaks of *al-'ūd al-manṣūb fī ākhir ṣaff al-maḥārīb* ' the beam set upon the last row of columns '. That the word *miḥrāb* may be applied to whatever portion of the mosque that has rows of columns I deduce from *al-Jawhar al-shaffāf*[2] where the mosque has *al-miḥrāb al-sharqī wa'l-miḥrāb al-qiblī* ' the eastern and western *miḥrābs* '. I think that this must be understood as covered colonnades on the east and west sides of the mosque court. The Ḥaḍramī mosque not infrequently has such pillared colonnades on all four sides of the court as I recall from the *jāmi'* mosque in Tarīm which has the interesting name of Madyan, presumably meaning ' the place of *dīn*'. To certain doors into this mosque on the east side Raḥaiyam gave the name of *mifqar* (pl. *mafāqir*). A photograph of such a type of mosque can be seen in D. van der Meulen and H. von Wissman's *Hadramaut*[3] the broad face of which, from my recollections of al-Ghurfah must lie towards the *qiblah*.

In front of the *maḥārīb* lies an open court, *ṣaḥn*, but it is called a *ḍāḥī* in Ḥaḍramawt, i.e. a place exposed to the sun, opposed to the covered *kanīn*. The hagiologies of the Āl Bā 'Abbād Mashāyikh[4] allude to the *ḍāḥī masjid Shibām* ' the courtyard of the Shibām mosque '.

A passage in front of the open court is called *al-majāz*, leading to the *jawābī* (S, *jābiyah*) or ablution place which, I recall, is considered unclean and hardly part of the mosque proper ; it is *maḥall al-wuḍū'*. *Al-Iklīl al-waqqād*[4] speaks of the *majāz jābiyat masjid al-Khawqah* at Shibām about the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century, so this is not a recent term either.

The minaret (*manārah*) is generally though not invariably at the north-east corner (*al-rukn al-sharqī al-najdī*), as in fact can be seen from the photograph of al-Ghurfah mosque in *Hadramaut*, but Raḥaiyam stated that minarets used, first of all, to be on the mid north side of mosques. Those who were the first to plan the minaret at the north-east corner of the *jāmi'* all very soon died. In this convention so sanctified by custom, there is likely to be some underlying significance but it seems to have been forgotten.

On the western side of *jawāmi'* or mosques of assembly, and the *jabbānah* which is the mosque at a burial place,[5] there is usually a small door for the *ṣalāt al-'īd* and for the prayer over the dead. There is usually also a door for the *khaṭīb* to enter without passing through the congregation. (It is interesting to remark that the prayer for rain (*al-istisqā'*) is held in the *misyāl* or flood-bed,

[1] ' Materials for South Arabian history ', *BSOAS*, XIII, 2, 1950, 305.

[2] op. cit., tale no. 328.

[3] *Hadramaut*, Leiden, 1932, opp. p. 192.

[4] *Al-Iklīl al-waqqād*, cf. ' Materials for South Arabian history, II ', *BSOAS*, XIII, 3, 1950, 589. I was able to examine copies of this work in Ḥuraiḍah and in Saiwūn in 1954.

[5] Discussed in ' The cemeteries of Tarīm ', *Le Muséon*, LXII, 1949, 158.

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everywhere. In Tarīm by custom it is held in the watercourse which passes through its three cemeteries.)

The mosque, like an ordinary house, is built on a foundation platform of stones several feet above ordinary ground level; on one side, sometimes on all sides, this projects beyond the walls to form a sort of bank known in Tarīm as *al-'uṣbī*, explained as *dakkah* or *ruqdah ṭawīlah*. *Dakkah* is the common word for this step or bank, and indeed I remember hearing it used for the same purpose as far away from Arabia as in a district town south of Kano in Nigeria.[1] For the period 834–7/1430–4 *al-Iklīl al-waqqād* speaks of the *'uṣbī* of the *jāmi'* at al-Ghurfah which, as we have noted, is illustrated in *Hadramaut*. Again in the Ḥuraiḍah copy of *al-Iklīl al-waqqād* it is said of a mosque in the year 839/1435, *wa-'ād nūrat-uh baqīyah wa-'l-'uṣbī* ' its plaster still remains, and its *'uṣbī* '. At the tomb of Shaikh 'Uthmān near Aden the manṣab informed me that this same bank was called *al-baghalah*.

Miḥrāb

The Ḥaḍramī sources so far cited relating to the curious use of *miḥrāb* in Ḥaḍramawt are comparatively late, but Imra'u 'l-Qais refers to the *maḥārīb al-aqwāl*, the *qails* being South Arabian princes as is well known.[2]

Saiyid 'Alawī b. Ṭāhir[3] relates that the saint Shaikh Sālim (Bā Faḍl) (ob. 581/1185–6) who set up schools in Hajar was wrongfully slain while he was in his *miḥrāb* reciting the *sūrahs*. Al-Sharjī[4] speaks of a saint as ' sitting in the *miḥrāb* ' of a school (*madrasah*). Al-Sharjī[5] does, however, use *miḥrāb* unequivocally in the sense of *qiblah* or the place where the *qiblah* was. I was surprised to learn recently too that in Aden the Imām actually sits in the niche, when delivering the *khuṭbah*, for the *minbar* is moved into the niche which is large enough to hold it.

In the Mombasa mosques, in two or three of which I attended an evening *darsah*, the teacher does not sit in the niche, but in front of it, and the rest of those attending the *darsah* are mostly arranged facing him. It is interesting too, that at Malindi in Kenya, offerings (*nadhīrah*) of incense are made at the *qiblah* niche. This so persists that in the ruined *qiblahs* of Gedi which he has excavated, James Kirkman showed me offerings of this sort newly made as a form of *ṣadaqah*. It seems that the word *miḥrāb* is hardly known here, and indeed it is apparently not really used in spoken Swahili at all or by the Arabic speakers of the coast, though the word being a cult term naturally figures in the Swahili dictionaries. This, I think, is only to be explained by the fact that the Arabic vocabulary of Swahili and of the Muslim cult are directly derived from the Shāfi'ī Arabs of Ḥaḍramawt and, perhaps to a lesser extent, of the

[1] *Dakkah* is discussed in ' A Judeo-Arab house-deed from Ḥabbān ', *JRAS*, 1953, p. 129. Al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, Cairo, 1903, 77, refers to the *dakkah* of a house.

[2] W. M. de Slane, *Le Diwan d' Amro 'l-Kais*, Paris, 1837, p. 52/33.

[3] *'Uqūd al-almās*, Singapore, 1949– , II, 75.

[4] op. cit., 108.

[5] op. cit., 154.

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Yemen, who may have commonly used the word *miḥrāb* for something not directly identical with the *qiblah*.

There are more than a few references to the *miḥrāb* in the early Islāmic period which demonstrate that it was not applied to a niche but to something much larger. At Damascus in the Great Mosque the portion known as the '*Miḥrāb* of the Companions of the Prophet' may have been an area rather than a wall.[1] Al-Kindī [2] speaks of the *qiblah* of the mosque as a place where prayer was made, and this might imply that the latter term too meant more than a niche at first. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam [3] speaks of a person before 89/707 who *raka'a fi 'l-miḥrāb* 'made the prostrations in the *miḥrāb*', and Ibn Qalānisī [4] refers to *miḥrāb al-muṣallā* and uses *maḥāribah* in a way which implies that they were not prayer-niches, but a part of the mosque in which numbers of people could stand and pray. Yet again there are early references to *miḥrābs* of David and other prophets at Jerusalem giving the impression that they were some sort of chapel.[5]

A tradition on the authority of Suyūṭī is quoted by Lammens,[6] which has been taken rather uncritically by those who have used it. *Ittaqū hāḏihi 'l-maḏābiḥ, ya'ni 'l-maḥārīb* 'disassociate yourselves from [7] these *maḏbaḥs* (lit. places of slaughter), meaning *miḥrābs*'. It has previously been suggested by certain scholars that it was forbidden to use the *miḥrāb* (which they understand in the sense of a prayer-niche) because it was linked with the Christian cult. However there is a clue to the sense of this Tradition in the *Tāj*,[8] 'The *maḏbaḥs* (lit. places of slaughter, altars) are *maḥārīb*, so called because of the sacrifices (*qarābīn*), and the *maḏbaḥs* are the chancels (*maqāṣīr*) in the churches, the plural of *maqṣūrah*, and it is said they are the *maḥārīb* and the *maḏābiḥ*'. To understand *miḥrāb* in the sense of a *maqṣūrah* or chancel throws a very different light on the prohibition.

The Muslim traditional account of the evolution of the *maqṣūrah* is well known; nor does it seem to me that one need necessarily look for analogies

[1] E. M. Quatremère, *Histoire des sultans mamelukes*, Paris, 1837, II, appendix, p. 282 seq.; cf. ibid., I, 164, citing a text referring to the Umaiyad Mosque mentioning a '*miḥrāb* avec (*fī-hi*) trois *maḳṣūrah*'. Quatremère quotes several references to *miḥrābs* in the Damascus mosque which seem to show that the *maqṣūrah* contained or abutted on to a *miḥrāb*. Perhaps the phrase quoted means that the *miḥrāb* was so large that there were several *maqṣūrahs* in front of it. For this study the material he quotes is, however, rather late, except in so far as it seems to suggest that the name *miḥrāb* may have been particularized from the whole *maqṣūrah* to the *qiblah* in front of it.

[2] *The governors and judges of Egypt*, ed. A. R. Guest, London, 1912, p. 62.

[3] *The history of the conquest of Egypt*, ed. C. C. Torrey, New Haven, 1922, p. 238.

[4] Ed. H. F. Amedroz, *History of Damascus*, Leiden, 1908, 9.

[5] Ṭabarī, *Tārīḵh*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, etc., Leiden, 1879–1901, I, 2408. Ibn Ḥawqal, *Viae et regna* . . ., ed. M. J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1873, 112 seq.

[6] H. Lammens, 'Ziād ibn Abīhi', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, IV, 1911–12, 246.

[7] Here I have rendered *ittaqū* following my theory that it is not always to be derived from the root وقى but often from the root نقى, and that it means as it would in tribal law in South Arabia to-day, to purify or absolve oneself from. I think it will be conceded that this gives a better sense here.

[8] *Tāj al-'arūs*, older edition, I, 759.

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in the Christian churches of Syria. There seems no doubt that the Prophet prayed at the *qiblah* end of the covered area in the primitive mosque at Medina, that is to say that he must have prayed amongst the columns that supported its roof. Thereby the position of the Imām at the prayer was established. There would be no difficulty in placing some sort of grille or barrier to link these columns together, thus forming a *maqṣūrah*. Even so slight an alteration, so trifling an innovation made by the Caliph would attract the opposition of the meticulous Arabian conservatism which has to be experienced to be realized. So, in this Tradition, I see, not an attack upon the *miḥrāb* in its (later) sense as a prayer-niche, but as applied to the *maqṣūrah* introduced by Mu'āwiyah at Damascus. The Tradition is anti-Umaiyad in so far as the *maqṣūrah* happened to be an innovation of Mu'āwiyah, surely the most ' democratic ' of rulers, but it is really an expression of intense conservatism. Although it is an ancient Arabian word, it is not without relevance that *miḥrāb* does not appear in Wensinck's index [1] to Tradition, and from this the deduction can be made that it had no significance for the cult. It may have been only a technical term in the vocabulary of architecture.

Ibn Qais al-Ruqaiyāt,[2] in a verse addressed to the Umaiyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, speaks of a ruined castle (*dār*) being deserted ' as the *maḥārīb* of vanished peoples (*ka-mā aqwat maḥārīb dārisi 'l-umami*) '. This is perhaps a cliché of his style for it occurs a second time in his *Dīwān*.[3] The commentary runs, ' The *maḥārīb* are *masājid* (places of prostration) made of graven stone (*ḥijārah manqūrah*) and raised above ground level (*al-arḍ*), and therefore they endure, and they are the *naṣā'ib* '. The *Tāj* [4] states that the *naṣā'ib* are stones (*ḥijārah*) set up (*tunṣab*) around the Ka'bah, at which *labbaika* was said (*yuhallu 'alai-hā*), and where sacrifice was made (*yudhbaḥ*). Another definition given is that they are ' stones set up about a watering-trough (*ḥawl ḥawḍ*), the spaces between which are stopped up by kneaded mud brick (*madarah ma'jūnah*) '. This kind of structure is common in Arabia. From the commentary it will readily be perceived that *miḥrāb* in the sense of *naṣā'ib* comes very close to the Ḥaḍramī usage. A *nuṣbah*, of course, also means a *sāriyah* or column.

The association of sacrifice with the *miḥrāb* is reminiscent of the sacrifice at, or to pillars or stones. This also forms a part of the ancient ritual of the hunt which has survived to the present day in Ḥaḍramawt and which will be described at greater length in a forthcoming study of this subject.

A persistent poetical image is that of the statue in the *miḥrāb*, seemingly a cliché of poetic diction universally common to Arabia. Apart from the quotation from the *Tāj* (*supra*), there is al-A'shā's, *dumyat-un fī miḥrābi*

[1] A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance de la Tradition musulmane*, Leiden, 1936–

[2] N. Rhodokanakis, *Der Dîwân des 'Ubaid-Allâh ibn Ḳais ar-Ruḳajjât* (Sitzungsberichte der Kais. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien. Philos.-hist. Kl., CXLIV), Wien, 1902, 74.

[3] ibid., 222.

[4] *Tāj al-'arūs*, op. cit., I, 486

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Tadmura ' a statue (or image) in the *miḥrāb* of Tadmur '. 'Umar b. Abī Rabī'ah says,

Dumyat-un 'inda rāhib-in dhi 'jtihād-in
Ṣawwarū-hā fī jānibi 'l-miḥrābi
' An image at (the place of) an industrious monk,
Which they fashioned (drew) on the side of the *miḥrāb* '.[1]

I prefer to regard all meanings here as secondary to the basic sense of *miḥrāb* as a row of columns with their intervening spaces. From this basic sense one might render *miḥrāb* as ' niche ', but more likely as the side of the monk's cell, or the side of the chancel, i.e. a wall linking columns, or simply understand the verse as referring to columns with statues set up between them. This type of decoration was a common enough artistic convention in pre-Islāmic Southern Arabia itself as we know from the Hombrechtikon plaque published by Professor Honeyman, the provenance of which seems to be the Ma'rib region.[2]

That the *dumyah* was an image rather than a picture, can be demonstrated from the verse of 'Adī b. Zaid [3] *ka-duma 'l-'āji fi 'l-maḥārībi* ' like statues of ivory in the *maḥārīb* '. To revert to Tadmur too, it is of course rich in rows of columns, whether in its arcades or the imposing portico of the Sun Temple itself.

Landberg [4] quotes a verse from the *Dīwān* of Qais b. al-Khaṭīm which describes the Jews as having brought spices and perfumes to ' un magasin à coupole, tout près du ciel, dans son *miḥrāb*, *ilā ḳubbat-in duwaina 'l-samā'-i bi-miḥrābi-hā* '. This I should prefer to render as, ' a tent with its *miḥrāb* '. The Bedouin tent can in fact be said to be dome-like, as may conveniently be ascertained from Colonel Dickson's drawings [5]; the shape of tent that he illustrates may be found as far south as Baiḥān. The *miḥrāb* of Qais al-Khaṭīm I should understand to be the open side of the tent with its row of tent poles. One would then think of the articles of merchandise spread out in front of the tent, and hence *ilā* is used to express their position, while the owner of the goods sits in the shade actually inside the tent.

Landberg has also discussed Rhodokanakis's proposal to link *miḥrāb* with *ḥarbah* ' a spear '. However I cannot feel that *miḥrāb* is connected directly with the Prophet's custom of using a spear as a *sutrah*, recorded in Traditions quoted by al-Bukhārī and others. It may be that the spear was used in open country to ascertain times or direction by the sun, for one certainly speaks

[1] Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥ. Shākir, Cairo, 1937–56, II, 607. The phrase ' on the side of ' is susceptible of more than one interpretation; cf. W. Wright's edition, 378.

[2] ' The Hombrechtikon plaque ', *Iraq*, XVI, 1, 1954, 23–8. May this plaque perhaps represent a hierodule dancing at some religious ceremony, and a male devotee who has stripped himself naked in his ecstasy?

[3] *Al-Kāmil*, op. cit., II, 767; W. Wright's ed., 460.

[4] *Gloss. dat.*, 394.

[5] H. R. P. Dickson, *The Arab of the desert*, London, 1949, 68–9. The cloth projecting above the tent poles might conceivably be compared with a dome (*qubbah*), or vice versa the dome might be likened to the projection of the tent.

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to-day of the sun as having risen *qadr rumḥ* ' a spear's length '. On the other hand in Muḥammad's practice there may be retained the vestige of the cult which sacrificed at columns and standing stones, purified from any significance by Islām. To link *miḥrāb* with *ḥarbah* is attractive in a different way, for *sahm* ' an arrow ' is still used to mean ' a column ' in Ḥaḍramawt. Certainly the long low Bedouin tent suspended on a series of poles is not so very remote from a row of spears.

While I do not dispute the suggestions made by Maḥmūd al-Ghūl,[1] perhaps the pre-Islāmic *ṯḥrbt* (*supra*) is derived from the *taf'ilah* form of the root *ḥrb* and would have the fundamental sense of setting up a *miḥrāb* or row of *ḥarbahs*. Subsequently it might be applied to the row of pillars or the structure in which they were used. Professor Beeston suggests, however, that the word might equally well have the form *tiḥrābah*.[2] Possibly, too, there may be an etymological relationship with the word *raḥbah* applied to the court of a mosque [3] or house.

Miḥrāb and qiblah

It remains to suggest a process by which the *miḥrāb* became associated with the prayer-niche.

Miḥrāb evidently can mean a pillared sitting-place, open at one side, set at some eminence above ordinary ground level. Where it is actually described as lofty, I am inclined to think it equivalent to the type of pillared portico so common in the large Ḥaḍramī houses, set on an upper story, or on the roof, forming one side of a little court. This is a structure with which all visitors to the country must be thoroughly familiar. An example can be seen in the late Sulṭān 'Alī's palace at al-Qatn, though this is perhaps not the most characteristic.[4]

Landberg compares the *miḥrāb* with the *līwān* of Damascus, and in Palmyra, a good few years ago now, I sat in just such a *līwān* in a Bedouin house often enough, but it was not pillared. The ancient verse [5] supports this view,

Ka-'aqīlati 'l-durri 'staḍā'a bi-hā
Miḥrāba 'arshi 'azīzi-ha 'l-'ujmu

' She is like the choicest of pearls wherewith
the Persians light up the arch of the throne of the King '.

One is immediately reminded of Ctesiphon.

The ordinary Arabian, however, cannot afford to spend much on building construction, and in place of such luxury as a *miḥrāb-līwān*, is content usually to sit in the shade of his house, and spend the evening on his *dakkah*. The *maḥārīb* of the palaces of the ancient Arabian aristocracy may well be in

[1] See p. 442, n. 3. [2] See p. 442, n. 3.

[3] The *Tāj al-'arūs* refers to 'Alī sitting in the *raḥbat Masjid al-Kūfah, wa-hiya ṣaḥnu-hu*; cf. Ibn Samūrah, *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahā' al-Yaman*, ed. Fu'ād Saiyid, Cairo, 1957, 36.

[4] D. van der Meulen, *Aden to the Hadramaut*, London, 1947, illustration no. 61.

[5] *Al-Mufaḍḍalīyāt*, ed. C. J. Lyall, Oxford, 1921, p. 213; trans., Oxford, 1918, p. 75.

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allusion to the belvederes and porticoes with which the roofs of their castles were crowned. So when Ibn Hishām and Abū Nuwās [1] speak of the musk of the *maḥārīb* of Ṣan'ā'[2] the reception roofs and porticoes would be intended. Ibn al-Mujāwir [3] quotes Ibn Duraid,

Wa-'ḥtalla min Ghumdān miḥrāba 'l-dumā'i

' In Ghumdān (castle) he came to the *miḥrāb* of the statues '.

The verse is hardly to be interpreted literally as I have rendered it. The *miḥrāb al-dumā'* is doubtless the place where the women, all of them, by convention, lovely, are to be found. Their part of the house in palaces of aristocratic

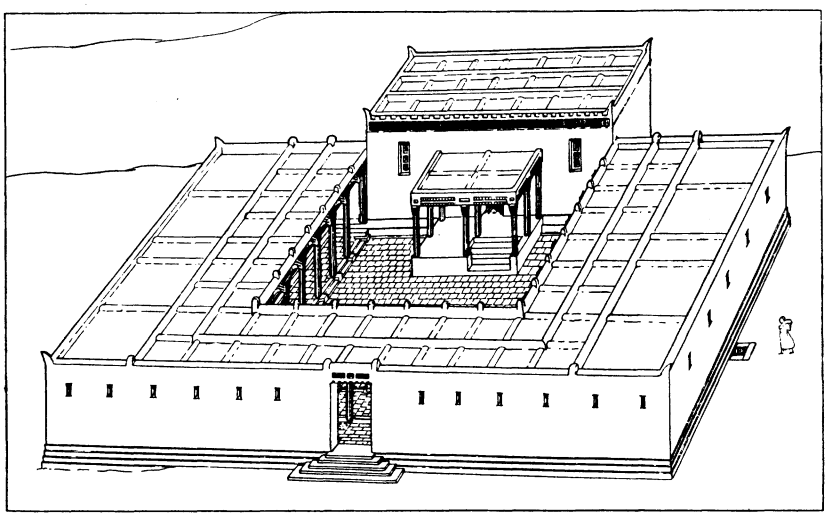

FIG. 2.—The temple at Hugga in the Yemen after Rathjens and von Wissmann. No roof drainage is shown, but probably gutter-spouts (*mizrāb*) should be supplied.

families is very often on the top floor, with access to their own part of the roof which has no doubt its own *miḥrābs*. The reference to musk could be an indirect allusion to the women, for it is curious how often *miḥrāb* is mentioned with perfumes. It is possible also, if perhaps less likely, that the allusion is to the Yemenite fondness for perfumes and incense. On the roofs and other parts of the house, incense braziers are often seen casually set down.

Rathjens and von Wissmann [4] show a reconstruction of the Hugga temple in the Upper Yemen (fig. 2). It consists of a court, surrounded on all sides by pillared arcades, with a hall in the same relative position, more or less, as the Ḥaḍramī *ḥammām*. In front of this pre-Islāmic *ḥammām* is a pillared portico raised a little above the court, whence it is approached by a flight of steps. This accords quite well with the description from which 'Urwah b. Mas'ūd is said, in the passage cited from the *Tāj* (*supra*), to have performed the *adhān*.

[1] Quoted in *Gloss. dat.*, 395.

[2] cf. A. Guillaume, *The life of Muḥammad*, O.U.P., 1955, 32.

[3] Ibn al-Mujāwir, op. cit., II, 182.

[4] ' Vorislamische Altertümer ', *Südarabien-Reise*, Hamburg, 1932, II, 65.

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It will be perceived that the plan of the Hugga temple, that of the Prophet's mosque at Medina,[1] and the plans of the early Islāmic mosques shown by Sauvaget [2] are basically identical with that of the traditional Ḥaḍramī mosque, namely a court with a pillared portion for prayer on the *qiblah* side. These may again be compared with the plan of the Great Mosque (*al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr*) of Ṣan'ā', known to have been built at the time of the Prophet.[3]

In summary conclusion it is proposed that the original sense of *miḥrāb* is a row of columns, that even before Islām it had come to be applied to structures consisting of rows of columns, invariably, of course, erected upon a plinth. As a feature of castles and palaces it came to be applied tropically to them. It is suggested that during the Umaiyad period, while retaining its other senses, it was the name given to the *maqṣūrah* which was situated in the plane immediately in front of the *qiblah* wall, but *miḥrāb* had probably already something of the idea of a *maqṣūrah* about it before then. I feel inclined to see in its ultimate development into the term for the *qiblah* niche, a direct derivation from its fundamental significance as a row of pillars, for the plans show pillars in the *qiblah* wall of the Prophet's mosque, but it may quite conceivably have developed the last-named sense from its proximity to the *miḥrāb-maqṣūrah*, the position of the Imām.

As a postscript I should like to quote a piece of indirect evidence which seems to indicate that *miḥrāb* signifying a *maqṣūrah* was used by the Sudanese Mahdīyah. The English version of Slatin's memoirs,[4] alluding to the five daily prayers, states that, ' On all these occasions the Khalifa attends in his *miḥrāb* (niche), which has been erected immediately in front of the lines of believers. It is a square-shaped structure, consisting of a series of columns connected by open iron-work, through which he can see all that is going on around him '.

Supplementary note

Maḥmūd al-Ghūl has further drawn my attention to a passage in 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā* (Cairo, A.H. 1348), IV, 239, which states that *maḥārīb* are innovations not known to the Prophet. From the text it appears that he understands *miḥrāb* as something like a *maqṣūrah*.

[1] Sauvaget, op. cit., pp. 94 (fifteenth century plan), 90.

[2] op. cit., p. 109.

[3] See the plan, based on that of Rathjens and von Wissmann, and supplemented with photographs in Hugh Scott, *In the high Yemen*, London, 1942, p. 127. Ibn Rustah, *Kitāb al-A'lāq al-nafīsah*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (BGA), Leiden, 1892, VII, 110, reports that it was built on a pre-Islāmic site, a temple one surmises, and that this *masjid jāmi'* was constructed by order of the Apostle of God, near the walls of Ṣan'ā', opposite Ghumdān, of stone and gypsum (*jiṣṣ*). In the place of the *miḥrāb* was the grave of one of the prophets (*fī mawḍi' al-miḥrāb qabr min qubūr al-anbiyā'*).

[4] Rudolf C. Slatin, *Fire and sword in the Sudan*, trans. by F. R. Wingate, London, 1897, 320. It looks as if ' niche ' is a rather unintelligent gloss of the translator, for what Slatin describes is manifestly not a niche, but a species of *maqṣūrah*.

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